

Message Text

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21/16

ACTION NEA-12

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

USIA-15 ACDA-19 OMB-01 AF-10 EUR-25 AID-20 DRC-01

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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INFO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 9570

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IS

SUBJECT: KNESSET ELECTIONS LIKELY TO BE ON SCHEDULE

REF: TEL AVIV 9521

SUMMARY: BROAD RANGE OF ISRAELI POLITICIANS ENCOMPASSING BOTH GOVERNING COALITION AND RIGHTWING OPPOSITION HAVE CALLED FOR POSTPONEMENT OF KNESSET ELECTIONS CURRENTLY SCHEDULED FOR DECEMBER 31. PROMINENT LABOR PARTY PERSONALITIES WANT POSTPONEMENT TO PERMIT RE-EXAMINATION OF ALIGNMENT POLICIES IN WAKE OF RECENT WAR AND CLAIM THAT GOI CAN ENTER INTO PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, ALTHOUGH NOT SIGN PEACE TREATY, WITHOUT NEW MANDATE FROM ELECTORATE. NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY AND SOME ELEMENTS IN RIGHTWING LIKUD BLOC WANT NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT SET UP NOW AND ELECTIONS POSTPONED ONE YEAR. BUT KEY LABOR ALIGNMENT AND LIKUD LEADERSHIP CLEARLY PREFER TO AVOID FUTHER POSTPONEMENT, AS BOTH BELIEVE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO GET ELECTION OVER WITH AND GET NEW MANDATE BEFORE PROCEEDING TO SUBSTANTIVE PHASE OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. WE THEREFORE BELIEVE ELECTIONS WILL TAKE PLACE AS SCHEDULED ON DECEMBER 31, BARRING, OF COURSE, ANY RENEWAL OF HOSTILITIES. END SUMMARY.

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1. AS REPORTED IN REFTTEL, WIDE SPECTRUM OF ISRAELI POLITICIANS

FROM GOVERNING COALITION AND OPPOSITION LIKUD OVER PAST WEEK HAVE CALLED FOR FURTHER POSTPONEMENT OF KNESSET ELECTIONS, PRESENTLY SCHEDULED FOR DECEMBER 31, FOR PERIOD RANGING BETWEEN TWO MONTHS AND YEAR. HOWEVER, GIVEN DETERMINATION OF KEY LEADERSHIP IN BOTH LABOR ALIGNMENT AND LIKUD TO PROCEED WITH ELECTIONS ON TIME, ALBEIT FOR DIFFERENT REASONS, IT APPEARS ALMOST CERTAIN THAT THERE WILL BE NO FURTHER DELAY.

2. IMPORTANT FIGURES WITHIN LABOR PARTY, INCLUDING AT LEAST TWO CABINET MEMBERS, ARE KNOWN TO HAVE CALLED FOR POSTPONEMENT (REFTEL). THESE PEOPLE, MOST IF NOT ALL OF THEM DOVES, CLAIM THAT AFTER ALL WHICH HAS HAPPENED SINCE OCTOBER 6 THERE MUST BE A REVAMPING OF CONCEPTIONS, A NEW ELECTION PLATFORM AND A NEW KNESSET CANDIDATURE LIST, AND THAT THESE OBJECTIVES CANNOT BE ACHIEVED BETWEEN NOW AND END OF YEAR. THESE SAME GROUPS ALSO CLAIM THAT THERE IS NO REASON WHY DELAY OF ELECTIONS ONCE AGAIN SHOULD AFFECT GOI'S PARTICIPATION IN MIDDLE EAST PEACE CONFERENCE. THEIR POSITION IS THAT GOI IS EMPOWERED TO NEGOTIATE, ALTHOUGH IT SHOULD HAVE NEW MANDATE BEFORE SIGNING PEACE TREATY. THEY SAY THAT IF PEACE CONFERENCE SHOULD REACH SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION BEFORE A NEW ELECTION DATE, ISRAEL COULD IMMEDIATELY MOVE UP ELECTIONS AND LET POPULATION VOTE ON DRAFT PEACE TREATY, OR IF CONFERENCE WERE STILL IN PROGRESS AT TIME OF NEW ELECTION DATE, POPULATION WOULD DECIDE WHETHER ISRAEL SHOULD CONTINUE NEGOTIATING BY THE WAY THEY CAST THEIR BALLOTS. BY IMPLICATION, PROMOTION OF PEACE WOULD BECOME PART OF LABOR PARTY'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN COURSE OF 1974.

3. LABOR ALIGNMENT'S COALITION PARTNERS ALSO HAVE CALLED FOR POSTPONEMENT, INDEPENDENT LIBERALS APPEALING FOR BRIEF TWO MONTHS' DELAY, WHILE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY CALLING FOR YEAR DELAY WITH ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT IN MEANTIME.

4. TIMING OF ELECTION HAS ALSO BEEN DEBATED WITHIN OPPOSITION RANKS. HERUT (LIKUD) EXECUTIVE NOVEMBER 25 REJECTED PROPOSAL OF KNESSET MEMBER BENJAMIN HALEVI FOR POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT. BASIS OF HERUT REJECTION WAS THAT MRS MEIR HAD ALREADY MADE CLEAR

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HER OPPOSITION TO FORMATION OF NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT, RENDERING HALEVI'S PROPOSAL MOOT.

5. WHAT IS REALLY INVOLVED IN ALL THIS POLITICAL MANEUVERING IS SHREWD JOCKEYING FOR POSITION BETWEEN TWO MAIN OPPONENTS OF THIS CAMPAIGN--MRS MEIR AND OPPOSITION LEADER MENAHEM BEGIN. MRS MEIR HAS SAID THAT SHE WOULD ONLY CONSIDER ADDITIONAL POSTPONEMENT IF BEGIN AGREED TO IT, SINCE OTHERWISE

LABOR PARTY WOULD SEEM TO BE DUCKING ELECTORAL CONFRONTATION OUT OF FEAR OF LOSING MANDATES. SHE IS ALSO BANKING ON SUFFICIENTLY STRONG SHOWING AT POLLS TO SOLIDIFY HER CONTROL OF LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP. BEGIN FOR HIS PART BELIEVES THAT LIKUD'S ELECTORAL CHANCES ARE AT THEIR HEIGHT RIGHT NOW, GIVEN WHAT HE PERCEIVES AS DISILLUSIONMENT OF ISRAELI PUBLIC WITH MEIR-DAYAN LEADERSHIP IN WAKE OF WAR.

6. MRS MEIR AND BEGIN AGREE ON ONE POINT--THAT GOI CANNOT ENTER INTO SUBSTANTIVE PHASE OF NEGOTIATIONS AT PEACE CONFERENCE UNTIL IT HAS NEW MANDATE. BOTH BELIEVE THAT POSTPONEMENT OF ELECTIONS WOULD PLACE GOI IN INTRINSICALLY WEAK POSITION AT PEACE CONFERENCE, SUBJECT TO CONSTANT CARPING ON DOMESTIC FRONT.

7. IN SHORT, LABOR ALIGNMENT AND LIKUD LEADERSHIP PERCEIVE THAT GETTING ELECTION OVER WITH IS TO THEIR RESPECTIVE ADVANTAGE. SMALLER PARTIES ON OTHER HAND FEAR THAT EARLY ELECTION CAN ONLY FURTHER DIMINISH THEIR INFLUENCE (AND KNESSET REPRESENTATION). SOLE EXCEPTION IS NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY, WHICH APPEARS TO BE EMERGING AS FULCRUM GROUP WITH INFLUENCE THAT WILL INCREASE IN DIRECT PROPORTION TO LOSS BY LABOR OF STRENGTH TO LIKUD.
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